DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 122 357 EA 008 086

AUTHOR Naumann-Etienne, Maren; Todd, J. Williams
TITLE Applying Organizational Development Techniques to In-Service Education.
PUB DATE 23 Apr 76
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, California, April 19-23, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation; *Feedback; Group Activities; *Inservice Teacher Education; Needs Assessment; *Organizational Development; Program Descriptions; School Systems; Surveys; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Participation

ABSTRACT

An attempt to develop a long-range, comprehensive approach to inservice education in a midwestern school system is described. A five-step sequence of activities was followed: (1) relationship building with administrators, a representative teacher group, and students; (2) diagnosis of system needs through site visitations; (3) survey of teacher concerns relative to areas identified during the site visits; (4) survey of program priorities of teachers; and (5) feedback of results for final program planning. It is suggested that organizational development techniques, in combination with inservice program planning, will establish greater willingness among system members to follow through on program recommendations, thus generating more opportunities for system self-renewal than conventional "shot-in-the-arm" approaches. As descriptions of data feedback with school staffs are lacking in the literature, the case presents a detailed account of a data-based meeting with administrators and a representative group. (Author)

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APPLYING ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT TECHNIQUES TO IN-SERVICE EDUCATION

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by

MAREN NAUMANN-ETIENNE[1]

J. WILLIAM TODD[2]

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, California, April 23, 1976

1: Region 10 Education Service Center, 400 E. Spring Valley, Richardson, Texas 75080

2: Bureau of School Services, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104

EA 008 086

ABSTRACT

Given the fact that in-service education has too often relied on random programming, the present case study describes the implementation of a five-step sequence for long-term professional improvement of a total school district: (1) relationship building, (2) diagnosis of system needs, (3) survey of teacher concerns, (4) survey of program priorities, and (5) feedback of survey results. As descriptions of data feedback with school staffs are lacking in the literature, the case presents a detailed account of a data-based meeting with administrators and a representative group.

Traditional forms of in-service education which assume that exposing an individual teacher once or twice a year to a new technique or method will make an impact upon classroom learning, have recently come under attack.[1] What is presently needed is not an individualistic approach at in-service, but one which places felt needs for improvement into a systemic context. If teachers are to implement a new approach in the classroom, they must secure support for doing so from their peer group and the administration. Therefore, the total staff in a school and its leadership personnel must be involved in determining what new approaches might be desirable so that adequate support structures may be developed for implementing the plans.

When developing a system-wide in-service program, our first assumption was that the individual school is the critical unit for improvement. However, one cannot view the individual school without considering it as part of the total community educational system. This implies studying the individual building in relation to other buildings in the district. For example, an elementary school is a feeder school to the middle or junior high grades, which, in turn, feed into the high school. Problems found at one level take on hightened meaning if they have significance for the level preceding and/or following it. In-service recommendations must therefore point out program areas which have a bearing on a system-wide scale, as opposed to those with school-wide ramifications only.

A second assumption was that improvement of a school or system demands changes in the behavior of the members involved. These changes will only come about if a problem-solving attitude is maintained where those affected by in-service decisions play a major role. The success or failure of in-

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1: See, for example, Goodlad (1972)

service education is directly related to the commitment of those it is designed to affect; the more a staff is involved in planning the events and procedures, the more likely it will want to carry on self-improvement throughout the year, beyond the days specifically designed for staff development.[2]

In our in-service project reported in this paper, we sought to improve the planning process by asking the following two questions: (1) What are the current conditions in the system? and (2) What interventions or program activities are most likely to solve current problems? This orientation perceived in-service as the "figure" upon a "ground" of ongoing organizational properties, such as the leadership style, innovativeness, and work motivation of system members (Miles, 1965). We thus viewed in-service as a form of organizational development designed to help the schools cope with the demands of external and internal change. Traditionally, in-service education has been regarded as the proper mechanism for periodically "tooling up" the faculty and staff of a school system. Yet, seldom are adequate assessments made as to where the needs of the system lie during a particular school year. Organization development, with its emphasis on problem diagnosis, can offer a workable alternative to the all-too-common situation of happenstance programming.

GOALS

Based on these considerations, five goals for designing in-service education programs were generated.

1. In-Service Programs Must Build on Real, Felt Needs

   Assessment of current problems in the school system forms the basis for planning in-service education. A broad range of participants should be included in the assessment phase -- teachers at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels; students; administrators; special education and guidance personnel; and parents in the community. Informal discussions should focus on interpersonal processes in the school and between the schol and the

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2: For a discussion of this point, see Lippitt and Fox, 1971.

community. They should bring out feelings about what programs need to be improved and which ones ought to be further enhanced because of proven success. Such one-to-one or small group discussions are designed to yield a full picture of the positive and negative forces operating in the system so that these forces may become open for analysis and change.

2. In-Service Programs Must Have the Support of Those for Whom the Programs are Developed

An informal survey does not provide a sufficient data base, however, subjective impressions obtained from individuals must be set before the system membership at large. Only then will agreements on issues between grade levels, schools, and across subject specializations become evident. This documented commonality of concern will form an important step toward joint planning, as teachers no longer need to sustain artificial barriers behind which to protect themselves from system-wide change.

3. In-Service Programs Must Be Implemented Through a Teach Approach

Once system needs have been verified, workable mechanisms for follow-through must be devised. The team approach guarantees the broadest possible involvement of those the program wishes to address. Teachers usually have a clear feeling for the leaders among their own professional peer group. These individuals should be brought together to form the steering committee for the in-service work.

4. Change Must Be Learned

While peer leaders may have been chosen for their outstanding performance in the classroom, it cannot be assumed that they will be equally capable in helping adults. A first step in the in-service training program will be to teach peer leaders the principles of team building, communicating effectively, making decisions, and dealing with conflict. Survey feedback sessions provide a valuable laboratory setting to prepare teachers for their subsequent work in developing programs according to identified needs.

5. In-Service Must be Evaluated

In order to assess if the new approach to in-service education has any impact upon school improvement, system members must periodically be asked to evaluate its effectiveness. Such feedback cycles will adjust the program to new needs which deserve attention. Evaluation will also provide administrators and citizens with criteria by which to determine if the program should be continued based on its merits in promoting self-renewal.

An opportunity for implementing these goals was provided when a district wanted help from the University of Michigan. Our consultant team was invited

into this district on the basis of a University newsletter which outlined the approach at in-service we are describing here. The invitation was accepted for two reasons: first, the system already showed an awareness for needed improvements, which guaranteed cooperation for the project; second, with a K-12 enrollment of roughly 2,000 students and a teaching staff of less than 100, the district seemed reasonably suited for a first tryout of our model. It was agreed that the district would serve as a pilot site in investigating the feasibility of our proposed sequences of activities designed to promote long-range in-service programs in education systems.

Aided by one more co-worker, we entered the system in the Spring of 1975. This was a two-day visit to each of the district's three schools -- elementary, middle and high school. What follows is a description of the events which took place during this and later visits to the district.

METHOD

A five-step sequence of activities was followed during the site visits: (1) relationship-building with administrators, a representative teacher group, and students; (2) diagnosis of system needs; (3) survey of teacher concerns relative to areas identified during diagnosis; (4) survey of in-service priorities; and (5) feedback of survey results. The total flow of activities, from contract formation to closure through data feedback, is summarized in the accompanying chart.

Step 1: Relationship Building

After a contractual agreement had been worked out with the district relative to time investment, dollars and mutual responsibilities, relationship building formed the first step in the project. Meetings were held with the administrative council, with in-service committees in each of the system's schools, and with a cross-section of students.

PLANNING A LONG-TERM IN-SERVICE PROGRAM

Flow of Activities

	CONTRACT FORMATION	Administrative Council District-Wide In-Service Committee
STEP 1	RELATIONSHIP BUILDING	Administrators Building In-Service Committees Student Sample District-Wide In-Service Committee Program Presentation and Diagnosis of Need for In-Service
STEP 2	DIAGNOSIS OF SYSTEM NEED	School Site Visits Discussions about: a) problem areas in the school/system b) interpersonal relationships in the school/system/with the community c) special interests and concerns for in-service training
STEP 3	SURVEY OF TEACHER CONCERNS	Formation of Questionnaire Items from District-Wide Problem Areas in Teaching and Interpersonal Relationships
STEP 4	SURVEY OF PROGRAM PRIORITIES	Formulation of Questionnaire from Teacher Input and Outside Program Offerings
STEP 5	FEEDBACK OF RESULTS	Administrators District-Wide In-Service Committee Building In-Service Committees
		PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Building in-service committees were set up by the principal, as was the student committee.

The purpose of the meetings was to explain why we were in the system and to enlist support for the idea of an in-service program based on system-wide needs assessment. We hoped that membership in the in-service committees would eventually be revised to fit the informal leadership structure in each of the schools. Although building in-service committees were initially set up by the principal, the point was therefore stressed that these committees were open to other teachers, as well.

These activities took place during the first day of our Spring site visit. On the second day, we began with Step 2, Diagnosis of System Needs.

Step 2: Diagnosis of System Needs

For this activity, the consultant team broke up and each worked with a separate school for a full day. The objective was to gain from the teachers as much information about the system as possible. To aid in the data gathering process, a list of questions had been prepared in advance. These questions aimed at problems in the school or in the district, the quality of interpersonal relationships both within and outside of the school, and any special interests teachers may have for future in-service programming.

Answers were recorded verbatim, where possible, and pooled from the three schools. Problems which came up recurrently were marked, as were

those which had a special importance to the overall functioning of a school district. Through this technique,[3] twenty-four items were generated which formed the substance for a survey instrument administered in Step 3.

Step 3: Survey of Teacher Concerns

During a second site visit, this questionnaire was administered to the faculties of all three buildings. Each item was to be ranked on a four point scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

A second activity of the day consisted of a fantasy exercise[4] to help teachers tune in with goal directed in-service programming. Teachers sat in small groups of five people each to promote open communications and the exchange of ideas. The groups followed a prepared handout in a step-by-step sequence of (1) fantasizing about what the system might look like a year from now; (2) sharing individual fantasies and selecting one to work on as a common goal: (3) describing that goal both in terms of its ideal state and the current state; (4) doing a diagram of the forces helping and hindering attainment of the desired goal; and (5) brainstorming in-service programs which might increase the chances for goal attainment. This list of in-service programs in relation to stated goals was turned in to the consultants, who used it as input data in formulating a second survey instrument.

Many teachers rated this problem-solving activity favorably, mentioning most often the fact that it had provided them an opportunity to work together on clarifying what education ought to be in the district. Equally

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3: The authors are indebted to Robert Rippey who taught this method during a Mini-Training Course at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C., 1975. See also Rippey, 1973.

4: For a similar use of this technique, see Lippitt and Fox, op. cit., p. 137f.

many complained that the time (one hour and fifteen minutes) was too short for this activity, and that a whole day should have been spent on it. Also, it was mentioned that the activity would have benefited from being held during the day instead of after school. This suggests that teachers welcome activities of this kind during in-service time which place their own thinking and involvement at the core of the program.

Step 4: Survey of Program Priorities

Program suggestions made by the teachers and outside offerings from other agencies were assembled on a second questionnaire resulting in sixty content ideas for in-service. All teachers and administrators assigned priorities to these program suggestions. There were ten priorities, with six entries under each. Finally, as an eleventh category, top priorities were to be circled. Program recommendations were later developed from the results of this prioritization, as well as from the results obtained by way of the Survey of Teacher Concerns.

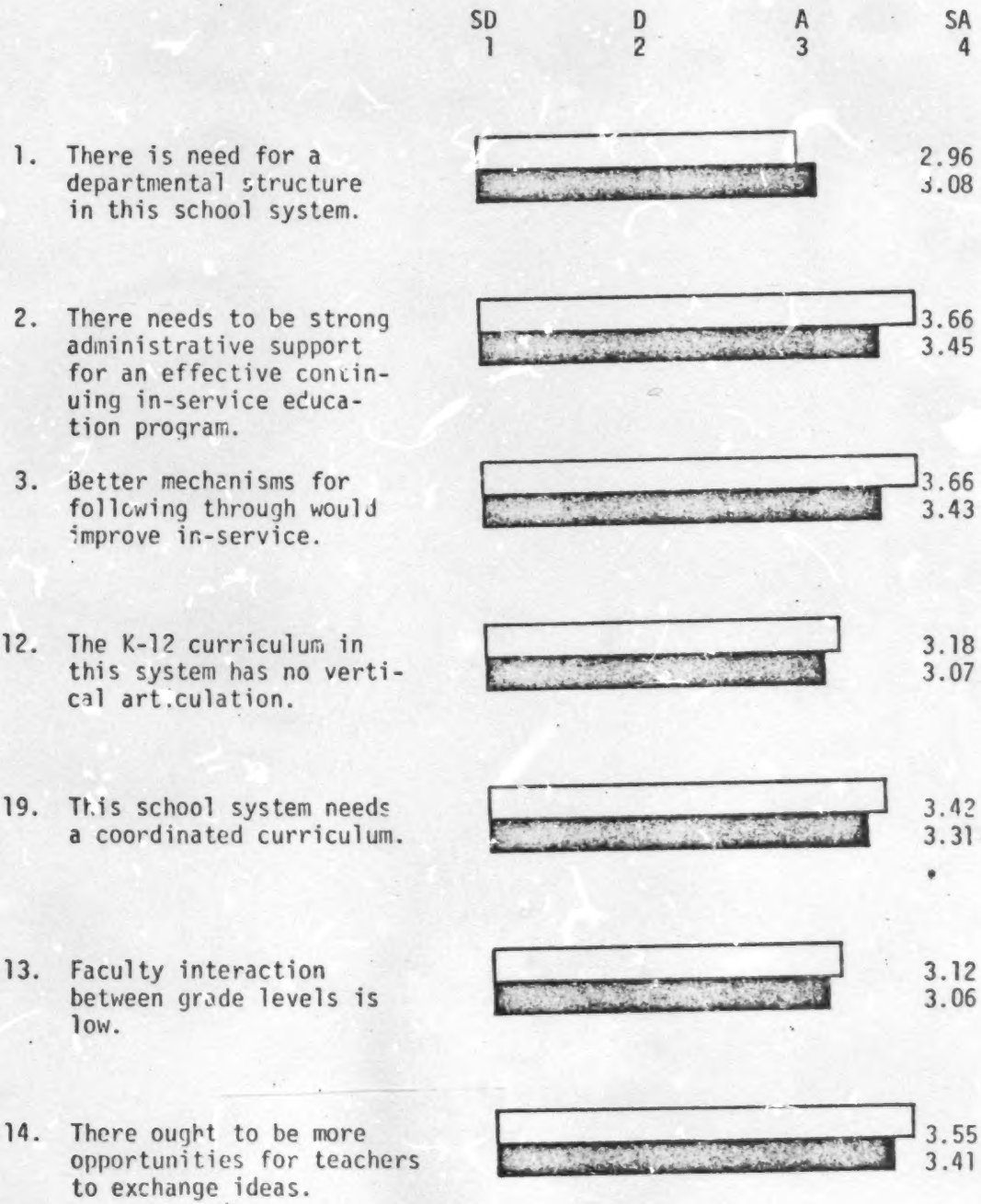
Step 5: Feedback of Results

A. Survey Results

For analysis purposes, all twenty-four items on the Survey of Teacher Concerns instrument were subsumed under four categories. These were (1) System-Wide Needs Assessment, (2) Leadership Appraisal, (3) Teacher Self-Assessment, and (4) Attitudes About Discipline. For each separate item, system means, as well as school means were computed. Bar graphs were used to illustrate the discrepancy between individual school and system scores (see Figure 1). Similar school-based data summaries for all four concerns categories comprised the first part of the data feedback package.

Figure 1.

SYSTEM-WIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT
(Elementary Teachers, N=36)



NOTE: SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree.
Solid bar is system mean.
White bar is elementary school teacher mean.

FIGURE 2

TOTAL SYSTEM PRIORITIES

	TOTAL SYSTEM				
	ALL TEACHERS N=103	ADMINIS-TRATION N=3	ELEMENTARY SCHOOL N=42	MIDDLE SCHOOL N=35	HIGH SCHOOL N=30
1. Creative Problem Solving - Total school community, including problems involving teachers, students, administration, and the community	7.06	9.66	----	7.00	7.86
4. Humanizing Education - Overview of concept leading to classroom activities	----	7.66	7.09	----	7.34
5. Improving psychological environment in the classroom	7.66	----	7.85	7.82	----
8. Effective Discipline	9.04	10.00	9.36	9.25	8.41
10. Providing for Exceptional Students - Gifted	8.37	9.33	8.45	8.55	8.14
12. Use of Role Playing as an Educational Tool	----	7.00	----	----	----
16. Career Education	----	8.33	----	----	7.10
17. How To Stimulate Independent Learning	8.52	7.33	8.42	8.73	8.30
18. Working with Slow Learners	7.31	7.33	7.36	7.85	----
20. Behavior Modification Through Positive Reinforcement	----	8.00	----	7.28	----
23. Opportunities for Visiting Other Schools	7.20	----	----	----	8.76
24. Opportunities for Staff Interaction	7.36	9.33	8.02	----	8.00
25. Faculty Advisory Council: Its Function	----	8.33	----	----	----
26. Make It, Take It Workshops	----	----	7.97	----	----
27. Values Clarification - Helping Students To Develop Values	7.67	----	7.40	7.61	7.96
29. Parental Involvement in School System	----	8.00	----	7.54	----
34. Management by Objectives	----	8.00	----	----	----
36. The Hyperactive Child	----	----	7.19	----	----
37. Learning Disabilities	----	7.33	----	----	----
41. Team Teaching	----	8.33	----	----	----
45. New Ideas and Methods in My Field	7.78	8.33	7.14	7.97	8.46
53. The Effective Use of Subject Area Learning Resource Centers	----	8.00	7.16	----	----
59. "Catch-Up" Workshop	7.04	----	7.47	----	----
60. The Analysis of Teaching	----	9.66	----	----	----

The second part consisted of the results obtained by way of the Survey of Program Priorities. Included in the package were data summaries for the total system (see Figure 2) as well as breakdowns by school, grade level, and subject specialization. Finally, an overall matrix was assembled for all programs which had received a priority ranking of 7.0 or above by any one of the system's sub-groups.

These data were also summarized and interpreted in a written report. When the report was presented to the Superintendent in early August, we realized that by that time it contained potentially threatening information. The Superintendent had only recently come on board and had not been involved during the earlier project phases. In addition, the Board had just lost a millage vote which resulted in the subsequent elimination of all in-service days for the district. In light of these circumstances, the Superintendent elected to withhold the report from the Administrative Council and asked us to present only the program prioritization results.

B. Feedback Meetings

Assembled for the first feedback meeting were the three building principals and the chairman from the district-wide in-service committee. Initially, the Superintendent chaired the session, but then asked the consultant team to explain the prioritization data. After the data collection and reporting methods had been described, considerable time was spent deliberating what to do with the information in view of the loss of in-service days. As it was too early to make any programming decisions, the group concluded that it would be best if the three school faculties saw their results during the upcoming staff days just prior to the opening of school in the Fall. It was

hoped that this would encourage the staff to opt for voluntary in-service programs, or some other alternative to the present dilemma caused by the millage defeat. The group, therefore, set a date for a joint meeting by representatives from all three building in-service committees to review the data and plan the school-wide feedback.

This second meeting was scheduled for the following week. In the meantime, the Superintendent shared the report with his Advisory Council in an effort to seek their opinion about the potentially threatening impact of its contents. All three principals agreed that they wanted the results disseminated to their teachers. Accordingly, the consultant present for the second meeting assembled school-based data packages including both teacher concerns and prioritization data.

In attendance at this meeting were the principals, the chairman of the district-wide in-service committee, and six elementary, one middle school, and one high school teacher from each of the building in-service committees. While the Superintendent started the session, the consultant was soon asked to provide leadership.

In preparing for this session, we had searched the literature for advice on how to help lower level employees use and understand data as a start-up for problem-solving to improve organizational functioning. However, these sources yielded vague statements regarding the role of the consultant and the step-by-step flow of events during data feedback meetings. For example, Miles et. al. (1969) refer to the fact that feedback meetings often start with the heads of the organization who then

present the data to their respective work groups "in the presence of outside staff members." No mention is made of the type of questions which should be offered to these groups in order to help them comprehend the numerical information. Likewise, no account of the process of an actual work group meeting is provided.

Mann (1972) is equally oblivious to the need for more details in his account of successful feedback meetings in a large corporation. Only Bowers and Franklin (1974) provide a clear statement on the issue: "Survey feedback is not a sheet of tabulated data, nor is it the simple return of such data to some representative of the respondents. Instead, it is a relatively complex guidance method which draws upon the device of the questionnaire survey to upgrade and make more complete, rational, and adequate a process inherent in social organization." These authors also offer a description of the three steps normally involved in survey feedback: first, organizational reality is translated into abstract, numerical symbols; second, the joint perceptions of this reality by a group of people is summarized and tabulated; third, during the meeting, this aggregate of abstract experience must be translated back into common notions of social reality about which joint conclusions can be drawn. "It is precisely this translation-summarization-conversion process, resulting in a shared view of problems and strengths, which lies at the heart of survey feedback's pay-off potential." (Bowers and Franklin, op. cit.)

Despite this laudable focus on method, the authors remain elusive about the concrete steps a consultant must take to instill in his clients the desire to engage in the data conversion process. Beyond pointing out such requisite skills as thorough familiarity with the

data and an understanding of organizational process, the article offers little help to the organizational specialist faced with the task of holding his own survey feedback meeting.

For the present study, it was therefore decided to employ a design with as little structure as possible so that the proceedings during a work group meeting could be fully observed.

The consultant subsequently began with a presentation during which the bar graphs from the Survey of Teacher Concerns questionnaire were explained. As this information was new to the attending principals, they were not called upon to provide this data summary. It was also decided to go over the prioritization data again, although the principals had been exposed to this information during the Administrative Council meeting the previous week. Thus, the opportunity was provided to enter into a joint question and answer period after similar background information had been given to both groups by one source, the outside consultant.

As was to be expected, the discussion did not come off the ground in the large group. After a few methodological questions were raised, such as how the prioritization had been computed and when to present results to the faculties, several long pauses developed. This encouraged the consultant to ask for participants' opinions on breaking up the large group into three building units. Consent for doing so was especially sought by the middle school and high school teachers, as this arrangement brought them into a one-to-one relationship with their principal. With seven teachers present, the elementary school group was not faced with this potential concern. When no opposition was voiced, a limit of fifteen minutes was set after which time each group was to report back on their progress.

During the ensuing small group phase, the consultant stayed with the elementary group. The principal immediately took charge of the situation by showing the teachers how to begin analysis of the program priorities with the aid of a rank ordering system. Using the total system chart, he assigned numbers to each of the programs the elementary faculty had listed as desirable, starting with "Effective Discipline" as the number one priority. The realization that discipline had received the highest ranking shifted the conversation to teachers' acknowledging this as a real problem in their school, and giving suggestions for its remediation. While one teacher wanted to hold the consultant and the Superintendent responsible for follow-through on proposals for discipline improvement, the group was quick to suggest that its own internal resources were better equipped to develop such proposals. With this conclusion, reporting time to the large group arrived.

As the large group reconvened, each principal took turns elaborating on how his group had further worked with the data. The elementary principal's method of rank-ordering school-wide prioritities had been followed with some modifications by the other two schools. The high school group had picked out the top three priorities, while the middle school group had compared the rankings across grade levels in their building. The fact that discipline loomed large in all three schools brought the conversation again to a content orientation. At this point, the consultant suggested if the data feedback to the faculties could include both components the group had worked out so far: (a) gaining an understanding of the data through rank ordering, and (b) working immediately on the top priority by developing pro-

posals toward implementing better discipline in the district.

When this suggestion had been discussed to the point of reaching a new low energy level, the group was asked again to break up for the finalizing of school-wide feedback plans. This time, no particular time limit was set. After approximately thirty minutes, the subgroups reconvened on their own to share their plans and discuss the logistics of setting up the building-level meetings. This concluded the feedback session which had lasted for two hours.

We have taken the space to describe this meeting in such detail because to date no account of a survey feedback meeting with school personnel has been given. A summary flow of events is presented on the accompanying outline. We feel this outline has been successful in stimulating in the teachers and administrators present the desire to share the complete data package, in spite of its potential embarrassment for the administration. This meeting also encouraged participants to do their own data presentations. All three groups indicated that they had no specific need for a consultant to be present during the building-level meetings, which shows that data ownership had set in. The feedback session was thus instrumental in setting a long-range problem-solving effort in motion.

While our consulting relationship ended at this point, we promised the system to return at the end of the year, for three consecutive years, to assess the effectiveness of the process. If the schools wanted to contract with us for any part of the delivery of the various program priorities and system needs mentioned, they were free to do so, but they were encouraged to use their own internal resources first, or those sources closer by. From this stipulation,

OUTLINE OF A SCHOOL-BASED WORK GROUP DATA FEEDBACK MEETING

PARTICIPANTS:
(1) Superintendent (S)
(2) Building principals (PR)
(3) Teacher (T) Representatives from Building In-Service Committees (up to 20 people)
(4) Consultant (C)

TIME: Two hours

SETTING: Library or cafeteria with tables and chairs for large and small group arrangements.

MINUTES		ACTIVITY
TOTAL	EACH	
0	10	Personal introductions; brief announcement by S regarding purpose of the meeting.
10	10	C presents overview of data -- methods of collection and analysis.
20	20	Question and answer period.
40	5	Break up into building-level groups.
45	15	Small groups work on their particular data set.
60	20	Large group reconvenes and shares process of finding meaning from data. Generalizations are drawn for presenting data to total faculties.
80	30	Small groups work on building-level plans for data feedback to staff.
110	10	Groups present their plans, discuss logistics of implementation.
120	END	

we hoped that self-renewal would set in without consultant help sooner.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The reactions from the feedback meetings show that the techniques we employed had favorable reactions from the teachers. While in-service has often been regarded in the past as more of a nuisance than a benefit, teachers in our project were willing to cooperate with us, knowing that maybe, for the first time, the system was willing to invest time and money into the upgrading of its educational programs. The time spent in the field set the ground for a warm, reciprocal relationship between consultants and the school staff. This led to high returns of the two survey instruments, results of which were, in turn, made available to the administration and peer leaders of the teaching staff for further program planning.

In summing up our approach, it seems that programming for in-service education can be improved if total system needs are taken into account. Teachers in our sample have given us ample reason to believe that the old method of releasing teachers for an afternoon several times a year for in-service has been rather ineffective. Understandably, teachers want more than that, they want follow-up to the programs they have been exposed to during those afternoon sessions. The rationale for such follow-up can only be presented to the administration, however, if data are available which demonstrate a school's need for more intensive program overhauling. This service can be given to schools by linking in-service deliberations with techniques of organizational development, such as those described in the present paper. Careful diagnosis and feedback of system needs may lead to the acceptance of the (sometimes) uncomfortable realization that what is really needed is not an afternoon off teaching, but a systematic improvement effort in some of the areas of greatest weakness.

In-service education then becomes a tool for system self-renewal, addressing itself to all responsible for system change. It can thus be applied to open the way for lasting change in any system that is concerned with promoting the professionalism of its staff.

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